

Issue 2
30th March 2020

For these days ...

*‘I wait for the Lord,
My whole being waits,
And in his word
I put my hope.’
Psalm 130.5*

Dear friends, on Sunday morning the clocks went forward an hour and the cheer went up, ‘hooray, one less hour in the house!’ It just goes to show that even in these days there is good news and blessings to be found. There are signs of new life around us, as gardens begin to bloom and as a new week comes around, we can think ahead to all that we are looking forward to when this is over. Still, we mustn’t get too far ahead. Sometimes the best plan is to take a day at a time, knowing that at the moment, that is enough to contend with. And so, as we journey towards Palm Sunday this week, let’s take a moment to reflect together on yesterday’s lectionary gospel reading – a story that for John seals Jesus’ destiny on the road to Jerusalem. It’s a lengthy one, so I invite you to open your bibles at John 11 and read the passage from there.

Prayer

Lectionary Readings Lent 5

Ezekiel 37.1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8.6-11

John 11.1-45

God of the past,
The present and the future,
I praise you,
I seek you,
And I worship you as One God,
Father, Son and Spirit,
who is love,
And ever present.
Who is life,
And ever near.
Who is light,
And shines brightly in the darkness,
And meets me wherever I am,
And however I am feeling this day.

As I prepare to listen for your Word,
I pray that I might know your forgiveness for any wrong,
Your comfort in any worry,
And your peace through the storm –

Realising that you know me inside and out,
May I be honest about how I am doing.

Assured that your purposes for me are good,
May I be open about what I need.

And trusting in your love and the promise of new life,
May I be ready,
To wait for you.

God of the past,
The present and the future,
This is my prayer that we ask in Jesus' name,
Amen.

Reading

John 11.1-45 **The death of Lazarus**

Jesus comforts the sisters of Lazarus

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

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Reflection

Last Thursday, I found myself waiting in a virtual queue – the idea being that limiting the amount of people shopping, would help ensure that everyone got what they needed. I was told that there was 204,942 people in front of me and the estimated wait time was over an hour. 4 hours and 21 minutes later, I got to the front of the queue, and, as I feared, the item I was looking for – Calpol - was unavailable - out of stock.

In those moments, I couldn't help but think about Mary and Martha and the long wait they experienced when their brother, Lazarus, was ill. In their worry and despair, they had sent word to Jesus that his dear friend was sick, in the hope that Jesus would hurry and come and heal him. But Jesus doesn't hurry. Instead we are told that he keeps his distance and delays some two days, until he knows for certain that Lazarus is dead.

It seems like an odd decision. Surely his instinct, like ours, would have been to drop everything and go to help and yet, just as we are keeping our distance for the greater good, so Jesus knew the importance of that too. For he seemed to know that returning to Bethany – the place where he had been threatened with stones – would be for a greater end and purpose. And so, He waits and delays - keeping his distance until the fourth day, when the faith of the time would have it that the spirit, the soul, would have departed and all hope would be truly gone.

It is into this scene of despair and grief that Jesus comes to his dear friends Mary and Martha and as they meet him in their sorrow, from their lips come

the words, 'if only you had been here.' Such honest words. Words that I'm sure you and me have at times thought and asked God. Where were you when? Why didn't you come sooner? What is the point of all of this? I loved the commentary of Willie Barclay who said, 'Martha spoke half with reproach that she could not keep back and half with a faith that nothing could shake.'

For even in their 'if onlys', Mary and Martha trusted and hoped in Jesus and Jesus, seeing their weeping and feeling their pain, does something that anyone who loves would probably do - He weeps. Therein lies the shortest verse in the whole bible packed with a whole load of meaning. For this Jesus, who waited and wept, is the same Jesus who hears our questions, meets us in our confusion, concern and despair, and is the resurrection and the life. The one who defies expectations and does not save us from the pain and suffering of the world, but promises to be there in it with us, pointing us towards a cross, and an empty tomb and the assurance that there is much to look forward to and share in, even now.

There's plenty to look forward to on the horizon, not least because spring is also in the air. New life is happening and the Saviour of the world is at work, through his Spirit, among His people, looking towards the day when heaven and earth are made new.

And so as we wait in virtual queues, wait to visit loved ones, wait to return to school and work and some kind of normality, wait and keep our distance - may we trust that Jesus is with us, believe that in him we receive what we need and look forward, not to life as we have known it, but to life fuller and changed because of God's love.

Prayer

For rainbows that follow raindrops,
for daffodils that are bursting into bloom,
for green growing grass and buds on bare branches,
for squirrels scrambling and birds singing a cheery tune,
Loving God,
We praise and give you thanks.

Thanks for the beauty of creation,
Thanks for the love of family and friends,
Thanks for the care and kindness of community,
Thanks for all those who are serving at this time.

Especially today,
We pray for all the key workers:
Doctors and bin men,
Nurses and delivery drivers,
Supermarket staff and scientists,
Childminders, posties, teachers, funeral workers,
pharmacy staff and so many more.

May they,
 And each one of us,
 Know your strengthening and upholding
 as we enter into a new week,
 Especially as we pray for support for the isolated and lonely,
 And healing for the sick.

Peace for the dying,
 And comfort for those who grieve and weep.

Rest for the exhausted,
 inspiration for the home entertainers,
 and humour, patience and stamina for everyone.

Silence

God,
 Who wept in love in the face of grief and suffering,
 And who calls us every day to choose life,
 As we walk with you this week,
 May we keep safe and connected,
 And look forward in hope as we trust
 in the power of your eternal love.
 We ask it all in the name of Jesus,
 Who taught us to pray together saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven ...

As we journey towards Easter Sunday, I invite you to read through the Gospel of Mark – a chapter a day. Some of us online started this on Saturday 28th. If you start today, you only need to read three chapters to be on track! Until next week, happy reading – stay safe, stay well, stay connected; and don't hesitate to be in touch. God bless.

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